



# STAR TREKkin'

Ian Horner and Stephen Yarrow examine the Star Trek phenomenon and go boldly where no video magazine has gone before and talk to the *New Generation* Star Trek crew

Back in 1966, the year of love, peace and flower power, the American television network NBC launched a brand new science fiction adventure serial about an American space ship of the future and its reconnoiterings across the universe. It was a highly successful concept with simple but streamlined sets, imaginative dialogue and a few parlour tricks such as a dematerialisation process and an interplanetary crew member with pointy ears.

The show, called *Star Trek*, was to become a cult classic but not before it was abruptly cancelled in 1969 after just 79 episodes had been made and transmitted.

To the surprise of the studio, it obstinately refused to die. Its fans, who became known as Trekkies, kept it alive in magazines and





memorabilia, clubs and congresses. The show continued to enjoy endless re-runs on local and overseas television stations and Trekkies the world over prayed that the studio executives would soon come to the realisation that there was a whole new strange set of worlds to explore, audiences to seek out and profits to make.

That occurred in 1980 when the decision was made to cash in on the phenomenal success of the big screen space epics such as *Star Wars*. The original cast of the TV series were re-assembled for a theatrical feature film, *Star Trek - The Motion Picture*.

Trekkies the world over flocked to see their dedicated Captain Kirk, the logical, unemotional Science Officer Spock, lovable southerner Dr.

McCoy, canny Scottish Engineer Scotty and the rest of the crew again travelling where no man has gone before. It didn't seem to matter that the film's special effects overshadowed the characters, what was foremost in the minds of fans was that the Enterprise had sprouted a new pair of wings.

Following the success of that film, the cast and crew have since been re-assembled on a further four occasions, the fifth being the yet-to-be-released *Star Trek V: The Last Frontier*.

Throughout the early eighties, NBC Studios toyed with the idea of making an updated *Star Trek* television series. After all, the Enterprise had been creaking and groaning under the weight of the dreaded space disease holyheck geriatricus, which

always has proved fatal and a life-saving dose of regenerative script-writing seemed to be the perfect tonic.

When they gave it the green light in 1986, Captain Kirk and his colleagues made it clear that they refused to boldly go into anything other than the occasional feature movie.

That being the case, Paramount and *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry opted for a completely new cast for the new TV series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which was set in the 24th Century. This new series, which bowed on American television a year and a half ago, is today enjoying the same acceptance among Trekkies as did the original TV series two decades ago.

*Star Trek: The Next Generation* is scripted by old *Star Trek* hands Gene



Roddenberry and Dorothy Fontana, who was its story editor. But what about its cast? It was, after all, their chemistry, their variety and their team spirit that was so integral to the success of the original series. No problem, say the Trekkies, who have given their nod of approval to the aloof and authoritative Captain Jean-Luc Picard, played by the distinguished British actor Patrick Stewart.

Equally as popular is the new multi-ethnic and intergalactic crew. The First Officer, Commander William Riker, is played by Jonathan Frakes, an actor who looks uncannily like a young William Shatner. Brent Spiner plays an emotionless and rational android called Data, who is clearly a Spock clone. Denise Crosby, granddaughter of the late Bing Crosby, plays Lieutenant Tasha Yar with Marina Sirtis as Councillor Deanna T'Pol and Wil Wheaton as Wes Crusher. Stewart and his *Next Generation* crew are more than happy at their acceptance among die-hard Trekkie fans, whom it was feared may have rejected these Johnny-come-lately, intergalactic space travellers. "I take this role very seriously," said Stewart, one of Britain's most distinguished Shakespearean actors who is the first to admit that acting on a sci-fi series like *Star Trek* is a world away from playing Shakespeare on stage. "Physically it can be quite a taxing role, not least because you are concentrating all the time. And then there is the question of finding yourself talking to an oil slick or a grain of rice of something. That is not because the make-up is bad. Far from it. We are working with the best people in the business and I think it is so exciting that they have devoted no less than three huge sound stages on their studio lot.



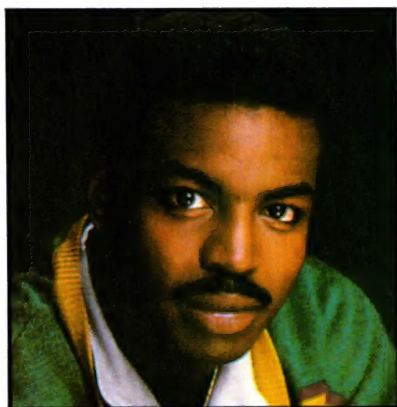
For me the excitement is realising that I am acting on the same set as the Marx Brothers once did. "*Star Trek* is treated as high camp in Britain but it is taken deadly seriously in the States, a real heavy-weight show with a philosophical point of view. Taking the Captain's chair is like taking the throne of England." Even though Stewart is aware of the *Star Trek* cult following, he has a down-to-earth view as to the form of entertainment the series should and does provide. "I believe we have a

Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner, the original *Star Trekkers*



serious role to play in putting a message across which is about moral values, a positive view of the future and the right way of doing things. But at the same time I don't believe that *Star Trek* has a mystical role to play."

Gene Roddenberry, and Paramount TV, who decided to finance it alone after the networks turned it down are thrilled at the show's success. "It's amazing, when the networks first saw the outline, they decided not to go with it. The beauty of it is that now the syndicated stations are withdrawing network shows from prime time in order to show the new *Star Trek*. In Australia and New Zealand as in Britain, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is coming via home video long before the broadcast networks will be invited to take their share of the action. In Australia, where it looks like being another year before the series will be shown on television, fourteen episodes are already available on video, the two-episode video-cassettes being released bi-monthly. The eighth in the twelve cassette series will arrive next month.



## Le Var Burton: the man behind the specs

The character of Geordi La Forge, the Enterprise crew member in the space age specs, is a galaxy away from his Emmy-nominated role of Kunta Kinte in the 1977 mini-series *Roots*, for actor Le Var Burton.

"In the beginning, I thought it would be possible for me to coast behind the visor," said Burton, "but in order for me to feel like I was fully in the scene I had to project myself through this thing, so I worked harder than I ever had in TV.

"As frustrating as it is having to wear this thing over my eyes, I can say it has made a better actor out of me. Wearing those shades has its advantages though. The most obvious is the mystery, no one knows if I am watching them or not. And, um ... I have been known to fall asleep. It's pretty embarrassing."